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SUBJECT: OMAN/IRAN: A "GOLDEN CHAPTER" ENDS

REF: MUSCAT 823; MUSCAT 835

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Domestic coverage of the Sultan's visit to Iran (Refs A and B) continued through his departure from Tehran, but has largely ended, with minimal commentary or other follow-on coverage. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On Thursday, August 6, all Arabic and English dailies prominently featured coverage of the ceremonies marking the Sultan's departure from Iran. Sidebar stories highlighted regional coverage of the visit, listed the security, cooperative, economic, and cultural agreements signed during the visit, and noted comments by Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Allawi that these joint initiatives will further regional stability and development.

¶3. (U) Editorial content remained limited over the weekend to columns in the Arabic state daily "Oman" and one private Arabic daily, "Al Watan," all praising the visit for its demonstration of Omani neighborliness and pursuit of mutual interests within the framework of regional stability. These themes were repeated and amplified in the only other commentary to date, the Sunday, August 9 edition of a weekly column in the Arabic daily "Al-Shabiba" and English "Times of Oman" that lavishly praised the Sultan and his government for adding "yet another golden chapter to the Sultanate's time-tested policies of maintaining good relations with all its neighbours, fostering peace with all nations and working for the prosperity and welfare of humanity irrespective of nationality or religion."

¶4. (U) Public reaction to the visit continues online, with commentary on the Al-Sablah (omania2.net) forum mostly echoing themes of the Oman's good relations with all its neighbors. The lead writer on a visit-related thread commented that the trip demonstrates how Oman stands apart from regional or international disputes, basing its relationship with Iran on its own priorities of peace and stability. Several commenters noted the Sultan's choice of headgear while visiting Shi'a Iran: for much of the visit he wore a distinctive, traditional white turban ("masar") specifically associated with Oman and Ibadhism, rather than the colorful version he generally wears. Others clucked at the Iranians' choice of backdrop for one meeting - a large map with a clearly labeled "Persian Gulf" dead center, something jarring to an audience far more accustomed to referring to the "Arabian Gulf."

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: For local audiences, the Sultan's visit to Iran concluded as it began, wholly within the framework of standard coverage for any royal state visit. If anything, this trip has disappeared more quickly from the horizon than usual, with coverage of its last day limited to the comparatively little-read weekend papers and to standard news coverage on TV and radio, with no added live or feature programming. Absent to date is any discussion of the Sultan's current whereabouts or coverage of formalities marking his return.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Local audiences will have noted one hiccup in an otherwise publicly smooth visit: while Ahmadinejad gave the Sultan a formal farewell at the presidency, Qaboos was seen off at the airport only by a member of the presidential staff. Whatever its meaning (if any) in Iran, in Omani protocol the absence of a

high-ranking representative is a faux pas that, had it occurred here to a foreign leader, would have been read as a definite slight. END COMMENT.  
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